

Tory Newmyer, *Roll Call*

Minnesota Rep. Betty McCollum (D) invoked the memory of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing - an act of domestic terrorism that claimed more than 160 lives - to warn Republican colleagues not to encourage violent extremists with heated rhetoric.

"I don't want another Oklahoma City to ever take place again," the typically soft-spoken McCollum said on the House floor Tuesday, speaking in support of a resolution remembering the victims of that attack. "And just as we will not give aid and comfort to al-Qaida, let us not allow the words of elected leaders to give comfortable excuses to extremists" bent on violence, she added.

Lawmakers in both parties have been on edge since passage of sweeping health care reform set off a wave of threats against Members of Congress, most of them Democrats. McCollum in her floor speech Tuesday drew a straight line between anti-government groups that proliferated in the 1990s - helping produce Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh - and an apparent revival of that movement today focused on the Obama administration. "When Members of Congress compare health care legislation to government tyranny, socialism or totalitarianism, it's like pouring gas in the hopes of extremism," she said. "Members of this House, Democrats and Republicans, have a duty to end the dangerous name-calling that can only inspire extremist militias and phony patriots."

McCollum's comments came after House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) on Tuesday blasted radio host Chris Baker for calling Democratic lawmakers a "lying, thieving ... bunch of commies" at a Minneapolis rally last week. That event was headlined by former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin (R) and Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-Minn.), a darling of the conservative tea party movement whose district borders McCollum's. "Not only do I not

think it is useful," Hoyer said of Baker's comments, "I think it creates an atmosphere and a debate that is neither constructive, and it can sometimes be dangerous." And asked about Bachmann's recent questioning of reports that anti-reform protesters hurled anti-gay and racist comments at Democratic lawmakers, Hoyer called the stance "questionable."

"I first of all think it undermines the credibility of somebody who is a denier," Hoyer said. Two African-American lawmakers said they were subjected to racial slurs by protesters during the health care debate last month, while another said he was spit on.

The No. 2 House Democrat added that Members need to urge their constituents to "conduct ourselves in a way that provides an environment for the civility" of debate.

Washington, D.C., is set for a reprisal of the tea party protests on Thursday, when thousands of activists are expected to attend a rally against the policies of the Obama administration.

The Tax Day Tea Party event, co-sponsored by several groups including the Fair Tax Campaign, Tea Party Express, Americans for Tax Reform and FreedomWorks, will take place at the base of the Washington Monument overlooking the White House.

Organizers of the group said last week that they intend to implement new steps to ensure the rally remains civil, so that their message is not diluted by personal attacks.

FreedomWorks President Matt Kibbe told reporters on a conference call last week that organizers would police the crowd in order to keep out "infiltrators from the left," who he said were responsible for some of the racist and homophobic remarks attributed to tea party activists that were hurled at Members during the health care debate. Offenders will be asked to leave the rally, Kibbe said.

Jackie Kucinich contributed to this report.